

## **The Frequently Used Verbs and their Alternatives in the Theses of Undergraduate English Education Students**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The research aimed at investigating the frequently used verbs in the theses written by undergraduate English education students at UIN Alauddin Makassar, classifying the verbs, and finding out the alternatives of the verbs which may facilitate students in the process of writing. The current study is necessary since it provides offered alternative verbs used in academic writing. Different from several previous studies that only investigate frequently used verbs in argumentative writing such as newspaper without availability of possible used verbs. It is expected that the alternatives can help students foster their academic vocabulary in order to have a better writing in terms of clarity and precision. This study employed descriptive research method underlain by corpus based analysis of students' vocabulary especially in terms of verbs used in academic writing. The objects of the research were undergraduate theses of alumni of English education students submitted in the library at state Islamic university (UIN) Alauddin Makassar. There were six theses selected from the last five year paper (in academic year 2013 up to 2017). The result of the research revealed that; (1) It has been figured out the verbs expressed frequently by students in academic writing. It is most likely that students tend to repeat or select a verb in the number of occurrences, (2) Several verbs which were most frequently used were 'show', 'make', 'use', 'help', 'expect', 'improve', 'give', and 'get'. The verbs have some synonyms in some various contexts in the students' scholarly writing, (3) The various uses of alternative verbs can be beneficial for students in several terms such as students would be able to create precise and good proposition. The list of alternative verbs may ease students to cite an expert's ideas by paraphrasing the predicate to avoid plagiarism as effectively as possible, (4) The most frequently used verbs found in the present study are categorised as procedural verbs, creative verbs, direct object verbs, reference verbs, and evidence based/data driven verbs.

**Keywords:** frequently used verbs, corpus based analysis, alternative verbs

### **ABSTRAK**

Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengeksplorasi kata kerja yang sering digunakan dalam skripsi mahasiswa pendidikan bahasa inggris di Universitas Islam Negeri Alauddin Makassar, mengklasifikasi kata tersebut, dan mengetahui alternatif sinonim yang bisa memfasilitasi siswa dalam proses menulis. Penelitian ini dianggap penting karena menyediakan kata kerja alternatif yang digunakan dalam kepenulisan. Berbeda dengan kajian-kajian sebelumnya yang hanya berfokus pada kata kerja yang sering digunakan dalam tulisan argumentatif seperti koran tanpa tersedianya alternatif yang bisa digunakan. Hasil penelitian ini diharapkan dapat membantu mahasiswa untuk mengembangkan kosakata akademik dalam membuat tulisan ilmiah yang bermanfaat dan baik dari sisi kejelasan makna dan ketelitian dalam pemilihan kata (diksi). Penelitian ini menggunakan metode penelitian deskriptif yang didasari oleh analisis kesatuan tulisan-tulisan pada kata kerja yang digunakan mahasiswa dalam kepenulisan akademis. Adapun objek yang diambil adalah skripsi-skripsi alumni mahasiswa pendidikan bahasa inggris yang diajukan dan dikoleksi di perpustakaan di Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Alauddin Makassar. Ada enam skripsi yang diambil dari kajian lima tahun terakhir (tahun akademik 2013-2017). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan deskripsi-deskripsi berikut; (1) Telah ditemukan kata kerja yang sering dipilih oleh mahasiswa dalam penulisan akademis. Terungkap dari beberapa mahasiswa yang menjadi subyek penelitian ini bahwa mahasiswa cenderung mengulang dalam memilih diksi kata kerja dalam jumlah yang frekuensi yang cukup signifikan, (2)

beberapa kosakata dalam bentuk kerja yang sering muncul adalah show', 'make', 'use', 'help', 'expect', 'improve', 'give', and 'get'. Kosakata tersebut tentunya memiliki sinonim dalam pelbagai konteks penulisan, (3) ketersediaan kata kerja alternatif bisa bermanfaat untuk mahasiswa dalam beberapa aspek terutama untuk memberikan argument yang tepat, serta memudahkan mereka mengutip gagasan penelitian untuk menghindari sedini mungkin penjiplakan, (4) Kata kerja yang paling sering ditemukan dalam kajian ini adalah kata kerja prosedur, kreatif, objek langsung, referensial, dan berbasis fakta/data.

Kata kunci: *kata kerja yang sering digunakan, analisis berbasis kumpulan tulisan, kata kerja alternatif*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Writing in academic world is awfully challenging. The core problem that students may certainly face is that how they then convey their messages in a paragraph. Having adequate vocabulary does not guarantee the flows of ideas. Moreover, students should be able to select certain words in order to have a good and systematic structure in expressing ideas. It is a must to think carefully about choice of words to develop a sentence. Certain words which are frequently encountered in everyday communication may not be suitable for use in academic essays. In addition, academic essays are expected to be clear and straightforward.

Clarity and precision are core principles of academic writing. The methodological process of writing entails the careful selection of words, including the appropriate use of verbs. Precision is especially important for scholarly writing in general and the writing of empirical articles in particular (Szuchman, 2008). Therefore, authors should strive to make certain that every word means exactly what they intended (APA, 2010).

It is clear that verbs are very essential to express ideas in form of clause or sentences. Students are demanded to use scholarly verbs in academic writing. Hence, students should be able to enrich their vocabularies in order to have precious content of ideas in a range of array of words. A key to fostering students' academic vocabulary is the availability of synonymous words. The researcher puts forward a claim that that a writer just remains imitating the words in previously certain papers instantly. In the other words, students tend to follow the structure even the words or sentences of previous writing (theses) collected in the library. As a consequence, students' papers frequently contain lack of less multiplicity of vocabularies and overused words.

Referring to explanation above, the researcher formulated the research questions as follows:

1. What were the most frequently used verbs in the undergraduate theses of English Education students at UIN Alauddin Makassar?
2. What were the alternative verbs being suggested to undergraduate theses of English Education students at UIN Alauddin Makassar?

## **METHOD**

### **Design and Sample**

The present research employed descriptive research method. The researcher applied the method to investigate the frequently used verbs in the theses written by undergraduate English education students and provide alternative verbs suggested to them or other next students. The objects of the research were undergraduate theses of alumni of English education students submitted in the library at state Islamic university (UIN) Alauddin Makassar.

### **Instrument and Procedure of Collecting Data**

There were three means that were provided in order to obtain data in this study. The first was the standard list of frequently used verbs created by the researcher as guide to seek the verbs. The second was that papers or books which were utilised to list every single verbs commonly appear in students' theses. Thirdly, the researcher employed Microsoft word equipped with a tool named 'find and replace' (Control + F) in order to find the verbs automatically. Regarding the alternative verbs, the researcher used context clues strategies and Cambridge Advance Learners' Dictionary to find out the context of the words. At the end of the study, it was also conducted interview to 3 writers of objects of the research as representatives. Interview is "an openness to sequenced forms of questions in order to follow up the answers given" (Kvale, 1996).

The data were gathered from 6 students' from the degree of different alumni. In this study, the researcher made a visit to the library to explore the papers. Typically, empirical studies consist of distinct sections to reflect various stages of the writing or research process those are introduction, method, results, and discussion. Related to the procedure of collecting the data, the researcher picked over the verbs required in this study starting from the first stage of research process (introduction) up to the last one (discussion). Furthermore, the soft copies can be collected in order to investigate automatically then in Microsoft word.

### Data Analysis

The researcher analysed the verbs with iterative process and keywords-in-context (KWIC). Meanwhile, Microsoft Word equipped with thesaurus, Cambridge advanced Learner's Dictionary, and context clues were deployed to find out the alternative verbs. There had been lists of reporting verbs that were already found by previous researches.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### The Most Frequently Used Verbs in Theses

If seen from the number of students who used the verbs, these are the verbs which are the most frequently found in students academic paper starting from the most respectively; **SHOW**, **MAKE**, **USE**, **HELP**, and **EXPECT**.

- The verb '**SHOW**' which was used by the six students (all subjects) in chapter IV for the number of occurrences was **116** times.
- The verb '**MAKE**' was also used by the six students in chapter II (**54 times**) and in chapter IV (**49 times**).
- Followed by the verb '**USE**' for **37 times** in chapter II by 4 of 6 students.
- Next, that is '**HELP**' in 34 times for 5 of 6 students (chapter II).
- The last mostly used verb is '**EXPECT**' in 16 times in chapter by 4 of six students.
- It can be illustrated in the following table:

	The Most Frequently Used Verb	Chapter	Total Frequency used	The Number of Subjects
1	SHOW	IV	116 times	All (six students)
2	MAKE	II and IV	54 and 49 times respectively	All (six students)
3	USE	II	37 times	4 students
4	HELP	II	34 times	5 students
5	EXPECT	I	16	4 students

## Verbs in Contexts

### SHOW:

\*As seen from the sentences below, the context of the word ‘shows’ means:

- to prove something or make the truth or existence of something known
- to make it possible for something to be seen

Here are the verb ‘show’ in context of sentences:

*the findings of pre-test in experimental class was showed in **Table 4.1**.*

*the findings of pre-test in control class was showed in **Table 4.2**.*

*the findings of post-test in experimental class was showed in **Table 4.3**.*

*the findings of post-test in control class was showed in **Table 4.4**.*

*the data showed that no students strongly disagreed and disagreed.*

*the data showed that no students strongly disagreed,*

*the data showed that no students strongly disagreed and disagreed*

### USE:

\*As seen from the sentences below, the context of the word ‘use’ encompasses:

- to put something such as a tool, skill or building to a particular purpose
- to take advantage of a person or situation; to exploit

Here are the verb ‘use’ in sentences in context:

*Regularization is an item in which a regular marker is used in an irregular one*

*certain types of verbs tend to use the same preposition*

*students’ errors can be used as a means to measure*

*he uses reading text as the test to find out the errors of adjective clause*

*an adjective clause uses pronouns to connect the dependent clause to the independent*

*dependent clause used as an adjective*

*Regularization is an item in which a regular marker is used in an irregular one*

*students’ errors can be used as a means to measure*

### HELP:

As seen from the sentences below, the context of the word ‘help’ encompasses:

- to make it possible or easier for someone to do something, by doing part of the work yourself or by providing advice, support, etc.

Here are the verb ‘help’ in context of sentences:

*but also it helped them to understand the text*

*readers use their schema) first to help them get a whole picture of a text*

*Instrumental reading is done to help people achieve a clear purpose*

*To get the reading activity more organized and to help students to get better comprehension*

*Visual media can serve a concrete image which can help students to easily interpret. . .*

*Teachers can also directly draw a picture on a board to help with explanation*

### EXPECT:

Looking at the context of the verb ‘expect’ in students’ writing cover at least:

- to think or believe something will happen
- to think that someone should behave in a particular way or do a particular thing
- to want something to happen or to be true

Here are the verb ‘expect’ in context of sentences:

*It was expected that the findings of this research provide significant contribution*

*the findings of this research were also expected to strengthen the current belief*

*The findings of this research were also expected to give practical contribution to English teachers*  
*It was expected that the findings was useful reference for*  
*The suggestions are expected to be taken as consideration*  
*it is also expected to teacher to be able to use this media*  
*The findings of study are expected to provide information about grammatical errors*  
*In general, through this research, the writer expects that the result*

### **IMPROVE:**

As seen from the sentences below, the context of the word **'improve'** means:  
 -to (cause someone or something to) get better

*He assumed that it was effective to improve the students reading skill*  
*The researcher attempted to improve the students' interest to read*  
*The effectiveness of using Hello Magazine to improve the reading comprehension*  
*Therefore, it helped the teacher to improve students' reading comprehension*  
*She reported that this strategy was effective to improve the students' reading comprehension*  
*Using narrative text is effective to improve students reading comprehension of second year*  
*Using interesting topic in reading comprehension effective to improve the students interest*  
*Pleasure reading material very effective and can improve the student reading*  
*The researcher did applied Hello Magazine to improve the students' reading comprehension. Students to*  
*do extensive reading outside classroom to improve their reading skill.*  
*To improve the willingness to learn*  
*It significantly improves the students' reading comprehension skill*

### **GIVE:**

As seen from the sentences below, the context of the word **'give'** means:  
 -to offer something to someone, or to provide them with it  
 -to produce or cause something  
 -to perform an action

*Although reading can give us many information*  
*The students did not feel pleasant when their teacher gives them a lesson*  
*Teaching reading in the class, for some students, has not given a significant influence.*  
*This research was intended to give empirical contribution*  
*This research were also expected to give practical contribution to English teachers*  
*The teacher gave a monoton strategy to teach the students*  
*An activity in which students are given a text*  
*Students are given a text, and then they have to underline*  
*This media could give contribution in improving students' reading*  
*Readers cannot directly give response to writer as in a conversation*  
*if they are given text which are too difficult for them*

### **GET:**

As seen from the sentences above, the context of the word **'get'** means:  
 -to obtain, buy or earn something  
 -to cause something to happen, or cause someone or something to do something

*the researcher used an interview guide to get some information's about the teacher*  
*Interview is a dialog which is done by the interviewer to get the information*  
*the teacher orally face to face to get the information*  
*After got the result of document of students*

*Most of students in learning get bored when the teacher uses conventional in order to make the students get motivated and get interested in learning the data that the researcher have got from the preliminary study.*

*none of them got excellent and or good score, three students (11.54 %) got fair score, eleven students (42.31 %) got poor score, and twelve of them (46.15 %) got very poor score*

### **The Suggested Alternatives Verbs**

The availability of the following synonymous verbs were analysed and launched by taking into account of the multiplicity of the context of used verbs. The process of finding out the context the words leads to the previous procedures.

<b>Analyse</b>	examine determine evaluate figure out interpret investigate resolve study test estimate explore
<b>Apply</b>	implement administer employ exercise handle practice utilize
<b>Argue</b> (Try To Convince; Present Support)	assert claim present suggest explain appeal
<b>Ask</b> (Question)	demand inquire challenge quiz request
<b>Ask (Request)</b>	call for charge demand request
<b>Assume</b>	think guess believe take for granted infer presume speculate

<b>Believe</b>	think consider suppose judge trust ascertain
<b>Carry Out</b>	execute accomplish perform realize finalize hold organize
<b>Choose</b>	select elect decide pick name appoint adopt
<b>Classify</b>	categorize arrange divide label distribute allocate
<b>Collect</b>	accumulate gather amass assemble compile
<b>Conclude</b>	deduce adjudge wrap up
<b>Conduct</b>	carry out hold undertake organize oversee manage direct
<b>Consist</b>	contain dwell cover enclose encompass
<b>Consider</b>	take into account reflect on

	deem judge
<b>Contribute</b>	devote granted commit
<b>Deliver</b>	convey distribute express share
<b>Describe</b>	illustrate explain outline specify characterize define express
<b>Determine</b>	decide settle on establish agreed on
<b>Develop</b>	build up extend enlarge expand improve
<b>Divide</b>	allot separate group share out allocate split subdivide
<b>Do</b>	accomplish perform carry out execute run
<b>Encourage</b>	inspire motivate boost persuade
<b>Expected</b>	hope project supposed
<b>Explain</b>	elaborate, clarify, explicate, explore
<b>Evaluate</b>	estimate calculate,



	<p>assess appraise test</p>
<b>Face</b>	<p>challenge deal with encounter tackle look toward confront cope with</p>
<b>Find</b>	<p>search discover come across locate, seek for</p>
<b>Finish</b>	<p>accomplish</p>
<b>Focus</b>	<p>concentrate direct adjust centralize</p>
<b>Get</b>	<p>obtain gain score catch acquire find mark accept grab</p>
<b>Give</b>	<p>offer provide bestow confer afford</p>
<b>Have</b>	<p>own encompass enclose cover possess</p>
<b>Help</b>	<p>assist aid hand facilitate support do a favor</p>
<b>Hope</b>	<p>suppose expect wish look forward to</p>

<b>Identify</b>	recognize classify categorize discover
<b>Illustrate</b>	demonstrate exemplify expose highlight mark point up
<b>Improve</b>	develop advance progress enhance enlighten
<b>Include</b>	involve contain encompass comprise consist of
<b>Increase</b>	comprise advance build up expand broaden enlarge boost expend raise step up intensify deepen
<b>Indicate</b>	signify specify designate
<b>Influence</b>	impact affect impress
<b>Investigate</b>	observe look into explore examine interrogate probe
<b>Involve</b>	engage associate implicate concern affect occupy

<b>Know</b>	comprehend perceive grasp notice experience
<b>Make</b>	allow create generate prepare form compose
<b>Master</b>	comprehend perceive grasp understand cram
<b>Motivate</b>	stimulate encourage trigger provoke induce
<b>Need</b>	entail requires necessitate demand call for
<b>Prepare</b>	arrange organize set up plan equip
<b>Prove</b>	show establish, demonstrate, confirm verify attest
<b>Provide</b>	supply facilitate support administer maintain arrange
<b>Recommend</b>	suggest propose urge advise advocate
<b>Review</b>	recall reassess

	evaluate
<b>Say</b>	declare state affirm argue assert claim report respond suggest announce answer
<b>Select</b>	choose pick decide on pick out elect
<b>See (To Perceive With Eyes)</b>	notice observe perceive identify examine recognize survey discover
<b>See (To Comprehend)</b>	grasp understand comprehend catch
<b>Show</b>	demonstrate illustrate display present exhibit mark
<b>Solve</b>	overcome cope with resolve figure out
<b>Suggest</b>	recommend propose urge advise advocate
<b>Support</b>	sustain maintain encourage aid provide

<b>Take</b>	hold receive capture grab reach
<b>Think</b>	view consider take into account assume guess judge conceive deem
<b>Use</b>	utilize employ apply manage practice run adopt handle
<b>Understand</b>	comprehend discern grasp interpret master catch apprehend deduce conceive note infer appreciate

The writer in this point argues what have been found in the current study. The study presents what are the frequently used verbs in undergraduate students theses. The students' writing involves three procedures which are the highlighting the verbs, finding out the the contexts of the verbs, and providing the alternatives or synonyms that may have similar meaning. The most frequently used verbs that were found in this current research are **show, make, use, help, expect, improve, give, and get**. Those verbs above should be paid attention as students, teachers, and lecturers. In academic writing, it is expected that a student has a rigorous proposition in expressing a verb in order to have better ways of expressing ideas.

In line with previous literature (Bloch, 2010), this section indicated that reporting verb could most possibly be categorized into frequently used verbs. In this case, the verb '**show**' was found as the highest numbers occurrences. The study is trying to provide synonyms to such aforementioned verbs which were frequently overused. Indeed, authors who submit poorly written manuscripts to journals can be nearly 12 times more likely to have their manuscripts rejected than are their counterparts (Onwuegbuzie& Daniel, 2005). Synonymy, or semantic equivalence, is an important yet intricate linguistic feature in the field of lexical semantics. Synonyms are not completely interchangeable; rather, they differ in shades of meaning

and vary in their connotations, implications, and register (Di Marco et al., 1993). Any natural language consists of a considerable number of synonymous words which enables English speakers “to convey meanings more precisely and effectively for the right audience and context” (Liu & Espino, 2012).

Regarding the project executed by Yeh, Liou, & Liin 2007, it investigated phenomenon of overused adjectives by non-native speaking learners (NNS). This study designed five online units for increasing students’ awareness of underused specific adjectives for EFL college writing. The recent researcher deliberately established the study because the use of verb and adjectives in academic writing might appear in similar circumstances as seen in the findings. In proof, in the last test (Yeh, Liou, & Li’s study), students had tried to apply more specific items (other possible alternatives) and thus enhanced their overall writing quality. Such strategies can certainly be implemented to obtain such remarkable improvement.

Moreover, clarity and precision are core principles of academic writing. The methodological process of writing entails the careful selection of words, including the appropriate use of verbs. Precision is especially important for scholarly writing in general and the writing of empirical articles in particular (Szuchman, 2008). Moreover, it was described in the findings that the subjects of the research had tendency to use a verbs in much amount of frequency. Even, a student seemed to use a verb many times in a paragraph. Consequently, students writing composition contains lack of less multiplicity of vocabularies and overused words.

Studies have shown that vocabulary improvement and lexical selection in writing tasks are also emphasized by evaluators of student writing (Engber, 1995 & Santos, 1988). The frequently used verbs abbreviated **FUV** by the researcher, such as **make, use, help, expect, improve, give, and get** should be properly used based on what the authors’ intention. The importance of word selection for writing has been recognized by scholars such as Johnson (2000), who stresses that a writer has to use precise diction to express the intended messages.

In relation to the offered alternative verbs, it has been attached some synonymous verbs that can be a reference to facilitate students in process of writing. The alternative verbs which were found in the current research are expected to help students determine which words that they really intend. The availability of the verb list is also hoped to be optional verbs to take into account. In the other words, students can use the offered verbs in terms developing, citing, and paraphrasing an expert’s ideas based on the context of their arguments.

### **The Classification of Verbs**

Verbs in academia (Meyer, 1997) are distinguished by the particular aspects of semantic understanding as described by Johnson and Maratsos (1977: 1744) that “thinking can be false; that knowing presumes truth; that thinking is not equivalent to saying”. Therefore, the typology of verbs comprised three major discriminating values: (a) verbs representing statement, (b) verbs representing cognition, and (c) verbs representing knowledge or action.

### **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

The current study reveals the frequently used verbs in theses of undergraduate English Education students at university followed by the types, and several possible alternatives of the verbs. Based on the finding on the discussion, the researcher comes to descriptions as follow: The most frequently used verbs were ‘show’, ‘make’, ‘use’, ‘help’, ‘expect’, ‘improve’, ‘give’, and ‘get’. The other frequently used ones are attached in the present study as well. The types of the most frequently used verbs found in the undergraduate theses comprises three major discriminating values which was creation verbs, direct object verbs, procedural verbs, and evidence based/data driven verbs.

The types of the verbs are categorised as the verbs representing knowledge or action, while other type also found was referenced verb categorised as the verbs representing statement. The offered alternative verbs can be recommended to help students in writing. The verbs have some synonyms in some various contexts in students’ writing as provided in the previous chapter. What is more, the present

study which was offering alternatively synonymous verbs, was expected to encourage and build up students' awareness that there are possible alternative verbs available in offline and online dictionary. In fact, it is most likely that students had tendency to repeat or select a verb in the number of occurrences. As a result, certain verbs are exceedingly overused. This could occur because of several reasons: that a certain verb is only suitable in a certain context; it is just only the verbs that students know which (generally used); in the same words, writers are lacking of vocabulary and tend to use verbs used in daily conversation to express their ideas. The arguments are according to the students' experiences in writing based on employed interview to the involvers of the research.

Based on the conclusion above, the researcher puts forward some suggestions as follows:

1. The current study leads to a consideration that students must be directed to be aware that there are many options, synonyms, or alternatives of a word that could be used in order to have a clear argument based on appropriate contexts.
2. For upcoming research, it is strongly recommended that the research is not limited in number of samples and methods in verbs analysis
3. In order to broaden the knowledge of corpus analysis, there might be a further study in relation to second or foreign language acquisition in academic writing. This might show and clarify how students express a word and why they then choose those vocabularies in terms of diction and context.

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